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Risks versus benefits of testosterone therapy in elderly men.

Basaria S, Dobs AS.

Division of Endocrinology and Metabolism, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland 21287, USA.

'Andropause', like menopause, has received significant attention in recent years. It results in a variety of symptoms experienced by the elderly. Many of these symptoms are nonspecific and vague. For this reason, many authors have questioned the value of androgen replacement in this population. Also in dispute is the normal cutoff level for testosterone beyond which therapy should be initiated, and whether to measure free or total testosterone. Testosterone levels decline with age, with the lowest level seen in men older than 70 years. This age-related decline in testosterone levels is both central (pituitary) and peripheral (testes) in origin. With aging, there is also a loss of circadian rhythm of testosterone secretion and a rise in sex hormone binding globulin (SHBG) levels. Total testosterone level is the best screening test for patients with suspected hypogonadism. If the total testosterone concentration is low, free testosterone levels should be obtained. Prostate cancer remains an absolute contraindication to androgen therapy. Testosterone replacement results in an improvement in muscle strength and bone mineral density. Similar effects are observed on the haematopoietic system. Data on cognition and lipoprotein profiles are conflicting. Androgen therapy can result in polycythemia and sleep apnoea. These adverse effects can be deleterious in men with compromised cardiac reserve. We recommend that elderly men with symptoms of hypogonadism and a total testosterone level <300 ng/dl should be started on testosterone replacement. This review discusses the pros and cons of testosterone replacement in hypogonadal elderly men and attempts to answer some of the unanswered questions. Furthermore, emphasis is made on the regular follow-up of these patients to prevent the development of therapy-related complications.

Publication Types:

- Review
- Review, Tutorial

PMID: 10495072 [PubMed - indexed for MEDLINE]

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